



STATEMENT
OF THE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
ON

“THE VALUE OF EDUCATION FOR VETERANS AT PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND FOR-PROFIT
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES”

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS’ AFFAIRS

JUNE 20, 2013

10:00 A.M.

Executive Summary

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) represents the nation's almost 1,200 community colleges. AACC and its member colleges have a long and strong record of service to our nation's veterans and we expect this relationship to continue.

Community College Veterans' Initiatives

Community colleges have a proud history of serving veteran and active-duty students. Nearly four out of five community colleges have indicated that they already have in place or are in the process of implementing programs and services specifically designed for servicemembers and veterans. Many institutions, particularly those with larger veteran populations, have established dedicated veterans campus centers where veterans can congregate and receive tutoring and other services.

Economic Benefits of Community College

College education continues to be the best investment Americans will make. Evidence is conclusive that attainment of postsecondary education is the surest path to economic security in today's economy. Community colleges play an essential role in making college accessible to the broadest swath of American society. It remains extremely important to ensure that veterans enroll in programs that best suit their abilities and inclinations.

Community College Tuition

The first principle of community colleges is to remain accessible through low tuitions. Last fall, the average community college tuition and fees for a full-time student was \$3,131. Tuitions are set by institutions and their boards; at the state level by the system office; or by state legislatures. Out-of-district or out-of-state students are often charged higher tuitions because they do not contribute to the state and/or local revenues that keep tuition low. Very few students pay more than the actual cost of providing education, which is \$12,400 for a full-time, full-year student.

Accountability and Outcomes

Community colleges are deeply engaged in improving their performance. In particular, there is a concerted effort to increase student completions. AACC has undertaken a major study of community colleges, "Reclaiming the American Dream," that calls for substantial change, and it is also launching its Voluntary Framework for Accountability. The federal government can play a key role by ensuring that institutions receive better data to monitor their outcomes.

New Forms of Credentialing

Community colleges are at the vanguard of new means of evaluating learning in higher education. These methods include prior learning assessment and direct assessment. A number of programs targeted specifically to servicepersons, both current and veterans, have been developed. Congress needs to encourage these efforts but make sure they do not become a vehicle for program abuse.

Statement

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is pleased to provide testimony to the Veterans' Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. AACC represents the nation's almost 1,200 community colleges. Our member colleges, as well as AACC, have had a long and strong record of service to our nation's veterans and we expect this relationship to continue for many years. At this time, we are particularly proud of the role of community colleges in helping veterans transition successfully back into the workplace by leveraging their education and skills.

Community colleges are as broad and complex as our nation. They are large and small, urban, suburban, and rural, and serve the most diverse population with a wide array of programs. They are constantly evolving as the communities that they serve change. People often refer to "the community colleges" as if they were a monolith, but nothing could be further from the truth. For servicemembers and veterans, community colleges provide trusted and accessible programs and services in an environment where they feel welcomed.

Community College Veterans' Initiatives

Community colleges have a proud history of serving veteran and active-duty students. According to a 2012 survey, nearly four out of five community college respondents already had in place or were in the process of implementing programs and services specifically designed for servicemembers and veterans. These include professional development for faculty and staff to help them better serve veterans, increasing the number of services for these students, and establishing Web pages specifically tailored to veterans. Many institutions, particularly those with larger veteran populations, are establishing dedicated veterans centers on campus where veterans have the opportunity to congregate and receive tutoring and other services.

Many colleges have dedicated transition programs for student veterans that aim to ease the transition from military to civilian student life. A great example of this can be found locally at Montgomery College, in Maryland, which has a program called Combat2College (C2C). The program provides services to veterans, such as dedicated academic advisors and veterans clubs and activities. Other colleges have formed learning communities for student veterans. Several of these efforts have been assisted by federal programs, such as the TRIO Veterans Upward Bound Program, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, and the Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success, a Department of Education program that only received 1 year of funding.

Community colleges are partners in their communities to help veterans in aspects of their lives outside of college. Many colleges work with their local Workforce Investment Boards to implement workforce training and employment services programs to meet veterans' needs. AACC is a strong supporter of the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program that seeks to help older veterans get the additional training and education they need to find employment. Some community colleges serve as conveners and provide space for community-wide programs focused on specific issues, such as physical and mental health. Many community colleges have established liaisons and centers where veterans feel comfortable seeking support, including women veterans who are least likely to self-identify.

Economic Benefits of Community College

Today, many people are asking, is college worth it? And the answer, now more than ever, is yes. Although there can never be an absolute guarantee, the evidence is overwhelming that the surest path to a family-supporting job is by obtaining a postsecondary degree. Multitudes of data support this conclusion.

For example, a study just released by the Hamilton Project states that the average annual earnings return to those who received an associate degree was 19.3%, higher than that associated with any other type of college degree. On average, individuals with an associate degree earn 20% more than those who hold just a high school diploma (*Education Pays*, College Board, 2010). This May, the unemployment rate for those with a bachelor's degree was 3.8%, while those without a high school diploma had an 11.1% rate (*New York Times*, June 7, 2013). We also note that between 1970 and 2005, associate degrees were the fastest-growing type of college degree earned (Hauptman, 2011), increasing at twice the rate of bachelor's degrees.

So, while college financing is a major concern for millions of Americans, sticker shock and overblown accounts of a possible student loan debt bubble should not obscure the reality that college remains the best investment most Americans will ever make.

Nevertheless, the choice to enroll at a particular college, and a program within that institution, carries immense consequences. Many parties, both public and private, are working to ensure that students are equipped to choose programs and colleges best suited to their interests and abilities, but further progress needs to be made. In some cases, there is no relevant information for prospective students, but in other cases there is too much overlapping or confusing data about graduation rates, loan debt, and post-college earnings. AACCC continues to work with both Congress and executive branch agencies in an effort to consolidate and systematize the information that students receive. An additional desirable strategy would be to convene a series of focus groups to ensure that any information provided has maximum impact in helping students make choices to guide education and careers.

Tuition

The first principle of community colleges is to be accessible through low tuition, providing a significant cost-effective option for servicemembers, veterans, and others. Last fall, according to the College Board, the average community college tuition and fees for a full-time student was just \$3,131. This was a 5.8% increase over the previous year. Over the last 5 years, inflation-adjusted tuitions have risen by 24%. For better or worse, future college tuition will be largely dependent on the level of public support the colleges receive. We are hopeful that this support will strengthen as the economy continues to recover.

Fortunately, in large part because of generous congressional support for Federal Pell Grants, other federal student aid programs, and the American Opportunity Tax Credit, net total costs for community college students have remained fairly constant over the last 20 years. We do not take this investment in our students for granted.

College tuitions are set by a variety of entities. In most states they are a local decision made by institutional officials in concert with their board of trustees. In some states, such as Virginia, the state board sets them for all community colleges. In still other states, such as California, they are fixed by state legislation. In all cases, these actions are before the public. We note that there is no relationship whatsoever between federal student aid and other benefits and community college tuitions. The fact that the maximum Pell Grant is and has been far higher than community college tuitions is *prima facie* evidence of this reality.

Community colleges do frequently charge higher tuitions for either out-of-district or out-of-state residents. The average out-of-district (in-state) tuition and fees are 16.4% greater than in-district charges, and on average out-of-state students pay 136% more than in-district students. This practice is informed by a basic principle of equity—heavily subsidized tuitions should be provided first and foremost to those who bear the taxes that support them.

However, virtually no community college student pays the full cost of his or her education. On average, each year institutions spend \$12,398 per student on education. Unfortunately, due primarily to public funding cuts caused by the recession, this amount has declined somewhat over the past few years.

Accountability and Outcomes

The accountability movement, with its emphasis on success as well as access, infuses all aspects of our campuses. AACC took a hard look at its member institutions with the issuance of the landmark report of the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, *Reclaiming the American Dream*. This report acknowledged the fact that, despite their essential role in the nation's economy and society, community colleges must improve their performance dramatically in order to fully realize their promise. It stated that "community colleges need to reimagine their roles and the ways they do their work." AACC and its members are deeply engaged in implementing the comprehensive recommendations contained in this report.

AACC is preparing to formally launch its Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA), which will help institutions and the public better assess how well colleges are doing. The VFA will provide a more comprehensive and finer-grained account of college performance than anything currently provided by the federal or state governments. AACC is anxious to get this project fully implemented, as it should provide a much clearer picture of institutional effectiveness in student progress, workforce outcomes, and learning outcomes.

But the federal government also can engage in a more active role in ensuring that colleges receive better data on the progress of their students than it does at present. There is no national system that tracks students through postsecondary education. While efforts continue to be made to change this, those efforts are still being met with strong resistance. In addition, the ability for institutional officials to know about the workforce (primarily earnings) outcomes of program completers is patchy, if slowly improving. While education should be far more expansive in its ambitions than simply providing job training, we also believe that obtaining data about the employment outcomes of our students is

essential for students, institutions, policymakers, employers, and the general public. The federal government can play an essential role in this regard.

New Forms of Credentialing

Community colleges are active in developing and using new methods to evaluate the knowledge, competencies, and skills students bring to campus. Nowhere is this more important than with the veteran population, given the fact of their previous experience in the services in what often are highly complex technical areas. Many means of evaluating these competencies have been developed and continue to be refined. These include direct assessment, credit for prior learning, and new forms of credentialing, particularly in certain industries. Companies are eager for this “talent pipeline” and work with colleges to establish career paths.

Many, if not most, community colleges award academic credit for prior experience gained in the military, and are working to help military and veteran students complete certificates and degrees more quickly. AACC is proud to be a partner with the American Council on Education, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, and three community colleges in the Maps to Credentials project, to design and pilot credential road maps that are cross-walked with military occupational specialties for veteran students. Another example is the College Credit for Heroes (CCH) program, a partnership of the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Through the CCH program, seven Texas community colleges formed the Texas Inter-College Council on Veterans (TICCV) under the direction of the Texas Workforce Commission. The mission of the seven partner colleges is to recommend best practices and processes in order for Texas institutions of higher education to assist veterans and servicemembers in achieving their educational and career goals. Most community colleges also are members of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium, a collection of 1,900 two-year and four-year institutions that, among other things, are committed to having processes in place to evaluate prior military and other learning for college credit.

It should be stressed that much of this innovation is occurring under the rubric of traditional academic institutions, not that it is or should be limited to them. A variety of parties have responded to the challenge of trying to document the learning experience that takes place outside the classroom. We salute these efforts. We note, however, that there is significant potential for abuse if federal funds are made available to entities that would undertake new forms of assessment. Therefore, we caution policymakers to move carefully into this realm.

It is also important to remember that, in addition to needing specific skill sets to meet the demands of a given job, prospective employers also need workers who can read, write, analyze, communicate, show up on time, and have a positive attitude. Some of these traits can be assessed, while others have to be demonstrated over time. We believe that service in the military does show the type of commitment and reliability valued by many employers.

Conclusion

Higher education has never been more important to our individual and collective well-being. Those who have served our country in the armed forces deserve the fullest ability to participate in postsecondary education. Community colleges remain dedicated to keeping the door wide open to these individuals to whom the country owes so much and to helping them find the opportunities that will validate and reward their contributions to the nation.

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WORK EXPERIENCE

American Association of Community Colleges

1/2010 – Present

Washington, DC

Senior Vice President for Government Relations and Policy Analysis

Lead the advocacy and research activities for the nation's primary association of community colleges. Develop and implement a comprehensive legislative and regulatory agenda impacting institutions and students. Work closely with Congress and the Executive Branch as well the higher education policymaking community.

Maintain close relationships with key members of the House and Senate and their staff, both Committee and personal. Monitor legislative and regulatory activity. Draft Congressional testimony, position papers, budget analyses, journal articles, blog postings, semi-annual association reports, strategic plan, Webinar presentations, and other written materials.

Supervise AACC's research function. Ensure that AACC's research is high quality, relevant, and well-coordinated with AACC's advocacy priorities. Oversee development of AACC's Voluntary Framework of Accountability.

Extensive public speaking and media contact. Frequently quoted in the Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Education, with media appearances on CNN, PBS, C-SPAN's "Washington Journal," National Public Radio and many other media outlets. Provide regular briefings to community college presidents and policymakers.

Supervise five people, serve on the association's executive management team, with responsibilities for budget development and strategic planning. Develop and manage office budget.

American Association of Community Colleges

1/2001 - 12/2009

Vice President for Government Relations

Similar duties to current position with responsibility for overseeing research.

American Association of Community Colleges

8/1992 - 12/2000

Director of Government Relations

Similar duties to current position save responsibility for AACC's research function.

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

5/1989 - 8/1992

Washington, DC

Director of Education Funding

Responsible for directing public and private fundraising for the primary national association representing private, non-profit colleges. Focused on Congressional and Executive Branch budget and appropriations processes, with particular emphasis on the Department of Education, National Science Foundation, and National Endowment for the Humanities. Advocated extensively on Capitol Hill and within Federal agencies. Drafted Congressional testimony and correspondence.

Played a leadership role in the Committee for Education Funding, a broad education coalition focused on maximizing Federal appropriations for K-20 education programs.

Communicated regularly with more than 800 independent college presidents through briefings, legislative analyses, and periodic status reports. Served as staff liaison to board committee on institutional development and new initiatives.

**Association of American Medical Colleges
Washington, DC**

3/1987 - 8/1987

Assistant Director, Office of Government Relations

Assisted in coordination and planning of legislative and administrative activities of five person government relations office. Formally organized government relation representatives from institutional membership. Participated in strategic planning concerning organization's public policy activities. Other duties as in Legislative Analyst position.

**Association of American Medical Colleges
Legislative Analyst**

7/1983 - 3/1987

Tracked, analyzed, and lobbied on issues of interest to medical schools, teaching hospitals, and academic medical societies. Wrote Congressional testimony and correspondence, newsletter and journal articles, legislative alerts, bill summaries, and budget analyses.

Maintained ongoing contact with House and Senate offices, both committee and personal, as well as Executive Branch officials, including the Office of Management and Budget. Frequent public speaking and presentations to membership. Served as Executive Secretary to Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research Funding, a coalition of 167 health and scientific organizations.

Issue areas included budget, appropriations, taxes, student financial assistance, health manpower, indirect cost reimbursement, charitable contributions, and the National Institutes of Health authorization.

**Edward Blankstein, Inc.
Princeton, NJ**

9/1980 - 7/1983

Lobbyist/Government Liaison

Researched, monitored and advocated on legislation and regulations concerning federal student financial assistance programs. Acted as liaison for client institutions with U.S. Department of Education. Analyzed and reported on all budgetary and administrative aspects of the Office of Student Financial Assistance. Maintained numerous relationships with both House and Senate Congressional staff.

**Douglass Walgren, Member of Congress
Washington, DC
Intern**

6/1977 - 8/1977

Monitored Health and the Environment Subcommittee activity, and researched legislation pending subcommittee action. Answered constituent correspondence concerning health, education, and other topics. Developed and administered constituent survey on consumer and energy issues.

EDUCATION

London School of Economics
London, England

Master's Degree - 10/1988

Major: Public Administration and Public Policy

Dissertation: "Incremental Budgeting in U.S. Federal Student Financial Assistance Programs"

Haverford College
Haverford, Pennsylvania
Bachelor's Degree, 1980

LANGUAGES

Intermediate Spanish

MAJOR PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Commencement Address, Harrisburg Area Community College, PA, May 11, 2002

Commencement Address, Dyersburg State Community College, TN, May 5, 2012

Keynote speaker, faculty convocation, Pima Community College, January, 2007

Keynote Speaker, Brookings Institution/Princeton University symposium, "The Future of Children," April 30, 2010

Keynote speaker, faculty convocation, McLennan Community College, May 2010

Keynote speaker, convocation, Tulsa Community College, August 17, 2010.

"Getting By in Hard Times," presentation, American Political Science Association annual meeting, September 4, 2010

Keynote speaker, Connecticut Regional Economic Summit, "Community Colleges and Business: Moving Beyond the Great Recession," January 14, 2011

Presentations to the Boards of Trustees/Directors at Community College of Allegheny County, PA; Louisiana Community and Technical College System; Community College of Philadelphia; Community College League of California

Convocation Address for Community College of Philadelphia, August, 29, 2011, "What's in the Crystal Ball for Community Colleges?"

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Guest Lecturer at University of Maryland School of Education on Elementary and Secondary Education Act legislation ("No Child Left Behind"), April, 2002, and October, 2004

Guest Lecturer at Georgetown University Public Policy Institute, "Federal Education Policy Concerning Community Colleges," September, 2007, and June, 2009

Guest Lecturer at University of Maryland School of Education Community College Leadership Program, October 2010, February, 2011

Guest Lecturer at George Washington Graduate School of Education and Human Development, "Financing Higher Education," March 2011

Guest Lecturer at University of South Carolina, College of Education, March 2005, May 2006

Guest Lecturer for Baylor University, School of Education, August 2009

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Public Policy Advisory Group Member, Campaign to End Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, current

National Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education Access, Council on State Governments, 2010-11

National Advisory Council on Distance Education Regulation, Council on State Governments, 2011

Executive Committee, Committee on Education Funding, 1989 to 2000; Vice President, 1992-93

Chair, American Council on Education Task Force on the reauthorization of Institutional Assistance Programs in the Higher Education Act, 1996-7

Executive Secretary, Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research Funding, 1985-87

AACC representative to German Marshall Fund program on "dual system," October, 1994

AACC representative to U.S.-China Liaison meetings on vocational education, Beijing, October 2010

PUBLICATIONS

"Pell Power," Community College Journal, April/May 2010

"Funding Efficiency," Council for the Advancement and Support of Education *Currents*, July/August 2010

"A Measured Response," Council for the Advancement and Support of Education *Currents*, March 2012

Journal articles for National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Association of American Medical Colleges

“Obama's Best Bet: \$5-Billion for Community Colleges,” *Commentary*, Chronicle of Higher Education, September 14, 2011.

REFERENCES

Available Upon Request